

**Report of the
Accreditation Visiting Team**

**Woodland Hills School
5858 South 900 East
Salt Lake City, Utah 84121**

April 12, 2005



Utah State Office of Education
250 East 500 South
P.O. Box 144200
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-4200

**THE REPORT OF THE
VISITING TEAM REVIEWING**

**Woodland Hills School
5858 South 900 East
Salt Lake City, Utah 84121**

April 12, 2005

UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION

**Patti Harrington, Ed.D.
State Superintendent of Public Instruction**

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Salt Lake City, Utah

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FOREWORD

The major purpose of the accreditation process is to stimulate school growth and improvement so as to increase student achievement.

In these efforts, the school staff makes a comprehensive evaluation of the school's programs, operations, and results. The school determines how actual practices align to stated objectives and resulting outcomes. It is a three-phased evaluation: (1) self-evaluation, (2) on-site evaluation by an external team of educators, and (3) implementation using units of the evaluation to improve the school by effecting thoughtful change.

The evaluation, April 12, 2005, was conducted because of the school's desire to ensure quality education for all students in the school, and to increase student achievement.

The entire staff of Woodland Hills School is commended for the time and effort devoted to studying and evaluating the various facets of the total program and to preparing the materials used by the visiting team. The excellent leadership given by Principal Joyce Hansen is also commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for their desire for excellence at Woodland Hills School, and also for the professional attitude of all members of the group, which made it possible for them to see areas of weakness and strength and to suggest procedures for bringing about improvements.

While these recommendations may be used to solicit financial support to acquire some of the materials, equipment, and services needed to carry out a more effective program, it is even more important that the faculty and administration utilize them as they continue to evaluate and modify course offerings and administrative and classroom procedures to more dramatically increase student achievement at Woodland Hills School.

Patti Harrington, Ed.D.
State Superintendent
of Public Instruction

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**Board of Regents Appointments*

1/3/2005

WOODLAND HILLS SCHOOL
ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF

School Administration

Joyce Hansen Principal
E. Dennis Liddell Owner/Director
Patricia Murdoch Owner/Director
Tara Sinquefield Satellite Administrator

Counseling

Debbie Rocha, LCSW Counselor
Elizabeth Neily Behavior Specialist

Support Staff

Carma Armstrong Receptionist
Christine LeJeune Registrar
Debbie Lisman Marketing
Jo Thompson Librarian

Faculty

Sam Badran	Emily Hagerty	Scott Lowe
Fawn Baker	William Hall	Todd Mower
Barbara Boland	Dean Higby	Brook Richards
Jamen Brooks	Kristin Hilman	Joshua Steadman
Shelly Ann Brown	Tara Hunsaker	Dennis Sorenson
Suzanne Ciraulo	Preston Hutchings	Allen Tanner
Shane J. Colby	Barbara Irie	Marilee Van Wagonen
Jennifer Davidson	Allison Klinger	Melanie Wheelwright
Wesley Ercanbrack	Emily Liddell	James Witucki
Tara Goodrich	Debra Lisman	

WOODLAND HILLS SCHOOL

MISSION STATEMENT

**WOODLAND HILLS SCHOOL PROVIDES A COMMUNITY FOR STUDENTS TO
CREATE A LIFE FOUNDATION WITHIN OUR GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT**

Goals for students attending Woodland Hills School are:

- Be engaged in their learning community
- Utilize individual learning differences to realize potential
- Recognize and enjoy the challenge of education
- Strive for creative and individual excellence
- Become an ethical contributor to society

BELIEF STATEMENTS

- We believe students learn in different ways and will be provided with a variety of instructional approaches to support their learning.
- We believe students learn best when they are provided with ample and appropriate opportunities for success.
- We know each student is a valued individual with unique intellectual, social, emotional and physical needs.
- We know a safe and physically comfortable environment promotes student learning.
- We believe teachers, administrators, counselors and parents, and the community at large share the responsibility for advancing the school's mission.

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Ralph P. Vander Heide, Ph.D., Consultant in Accreditation, Visiting Team
Chairperson

Judith H. Vander Heide, Consultant in Accreditation

Georgia Loutensock, School Accreditation Specialist, Utah State Office of
Education

VISITING TEAM REPORT

WOODLAND HILLS SCHOOL

CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE

Woodland Hills School is a private secondary school that specializes in working with nontraditional adolescents with mild/moderate learning/behavior problems. Often students learn in nontraditional ways that cannot be accommodated in a traditional public or private school setting. Learning abnormalities are not always limited to diagnosed problems requiring traditional special education. Difficulties in learning can be the result of social issues, motivational challenges, or family problems causing the student to “fall through the cracks” of the larger traditional school environment. The program at Woodland Hills School focuses on small classes of 10 or fewer students allowing for individual attention in a safe, nurturing, interactive learning environment.

The primary focus of Woodland Hills School is to offer a positive school experience for all students. Students are encouraged to succeed academically, to reinforce self-value, and to develop leadership abilities while learning responsibly in order to give back to their community. The students of Woodland Hills School experience multidimensional growth opportunities socially, emotionally, and academically. The school provides a positive, non-threatening educational atmosphere for students to achieve literacy and life skills, and meet individual needs to prepare for graduation and post-high school options.

Woodland Hills School was an existing non-accredited school when Patricia Murdoch and E. Dennis Liddell purchased it in 1993. Since they took over the school, it has earned full accreditation with the Northwest Association of Accredited Schools (NAAS), and educated over 700 students at the main campus and more than 900 through the various satellite programs. Many Woodland Hills School students have successfully returned to the public education system and completed high school there. Many others have graduated from Woodland Hills School and sought higher education in colleges or technical schools.

In 2001, administrators, with the help of a business and education consulting firm (Spectrum Solutionz), redesigned the school’s marketing materials, policies, and procedures, as well as the parent and student handbooks, and introduced LearnKey computer programs into the curriculum. The process involved the school’s staff, students, parents, and owners working together to improve learning outcomes, train all employees in Woodland Hills School policies, and standardize communication among all of the above.

In addition to its on-site classes and remediation programs, Woodland Hills provides educational services to six residential treatment centers that do not have their own accredited schools. Woodland Hills governs and administers all educational activities, including providing instructors, curriculum, materials, etc. Woodland Hills maintains all

student records, transcripts, and credit for coursework. All credits earned in these satellite programs are granted and issued by and in the name of Woodland Hills School.

- a) *What significant findings were revealed by the school's analysis of their profile?*

School personnel explained to the Visiting Team that there were no true “surprises,” since every effort is made at Woodland Hills School to be in touch with all aspects of the program (student needs, student concerns, concerns of parents, academic needs, etc.) on a daily basis. The Visiting Team observed that a thorough profiling of the school was completed as outlined in *School Improvement: Focusing on Student Performance* (National Study of School Evaluation—NSSE). The various sets of data that were collected for the profile have been analyzed and integrated to provide a description of the “big picture” concerning the performance of the school.

- b) *What modifications to the school profile should the school consider for the future?*

The Visiting Team notes that it would be helpful and informative to include more data on teachers (universities attended, total years of teaching experience, etc.). No students were included on the school improvement team. It is recommended that in completing future self-studies, students be part of the school’s self-study team.

Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:

As stated above, the Visiting Team’s additional information on faculty members should be included in future profiles, and students should be included in the self-study process.

CHAPTER 2: THE SELF-STUDY PROCESS

- a) *To what extent has the school community engaged in a collaborative self-study process on behalf of students?*

A notable strength of the school is its ongoing collaboration. All aspects of the needs of individual students are explored. It appears to the Visiting Team that the school community (staff, management, governing body, parents, and students) understands that at an effective school everyone should know what the institution stands for, know what it seeks to accomplish, and understand why it teaches in the way it does.

- b) *To what extent does the school's self-study accurately reflect the school's current strengths and limitations?*

Strengths and recommendations for growth are frankly outlined.

CHAPTER 3: INSTRUCTIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Woodland Hill School's desired results for student learning (DRSLs) are as follows:

1. Social skills/awareness
2. Life skills
3. Communication
4. Citizenship
5. Self-awareness

School personnel have been thorough in choosing these DRSLs based on researching the most significant learning needs of the students. Indicators and desired outcomes have been established for each, such as: “Students will demonstrate tolerance by recognizing the value of differences and similarities in others,” and “Students will demonstrate open-mindedness.” The responsibility of the school regarding the DRSLs is made clear in statements such as “Woodland Hills School will teach and model empathy and self-awareness enabling students to enhance capable and responsible decision making skills.”

Shared Vision, Beliefs, Mission, and Goals:

- a) *To what extent did the school facilitate a collaborative process to build a shared vision for the school (mission) that defines a compelling purpose and direction for the school?*

As noted elsewhere, collaboration is part of the school’s ethos. Working together to define a vision for the school is part of that ethos. The philosophy and vision for the school contain reasons for the school’s existence, including the nature of the students it is designed to serve. School objectives flow from the general philosophy.

- b) *To what extent has the school defined a set of beliefs that reflect the commitment of the administration and staff to support student achievement and success?*

A consensus-building process that includes parents and all stakeholders has been established in developing the beliefs and mission. The belief statements are appropriate for this school. They are free of jargon, are clearly stated, and can be understood by students, teachers and all stakeholders. The Visiting Team observed that the implications of the beliefs and the level of the school’s conviction to act upon the beliefs had been fully considered prior to finalizing the list of belief statements.

- c) *To what extent do the school's mission and beliefs align to support the school's desired results for student learning (DRSLs)?*

The school has followed the guidelines of NSSE in assuring that the DRSLs align with the mission and beliefs, and that the school's improvement plan aims to achieve the DRSLs in accordance with the overall philosophy of the school. The school is advised, however, to better explain (i.e., clarify the language) how the five DRSLs are directly aligned with the goals of the action plan. The verbal explanations were clear; however, the self-study was not, in all cases, easily understood concerning the alignment.

Curriculum Development:

- a) *To what extent does the staff work collaboratively to ensure the curriculum is based on clearly defined standards and the Utah Core Curriculum (with inclusion of the Utah Life Skills)?*

The Visiting Team commends all the collaborative efforts of the staff and administration, as noted repeatedly in this report. The Core Curriculum is closely followed, and the Utah Life Skills are included in the teaching of all subjects.

- b) *To what extent does the teaching staff work collaboratively to support the development of a curriculum that focuses on the school's desired results for student learning?*

Achieving the DRSLs in a collaborative way is accepted by all stakeholders as a learning goal of Woodland Hills School.

Quality Instructional Design:

- a) *To what extent does the professional staff design and implement a variety of learning experiences that actively engage students?*

Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are used to facilitate learning for each student at his/her level of ability and interest. Various approaches to learning/teaching are used. Also, the Visiting Team observed that the curriculum, in its content, design, implementation, assessment, and review, reflects the school's philosophy, objectives, and policies, which includes the provision of variety and individualization. Therefore, curriculum design provides for the varied developmental, academic, social, physical, and emotional needs of Woodland Hills School's special students. It develops skills and abilities that should prepare students for lifelong learning.

- b) *To what extent does the professional staff employ a variety of instructional strategies to ensure the needs of different learners are met?*

See above.

- c) *To what extent do the professional staff and leadership provide additional opportunities which support student learning?*

Extracurricular and adjunct learning takes place on a regular basis. Again, individualization is considered. The self-study lists some of the “additional opportunities,” which include Renaissance Club, Mamilton Café, and Dinner Group.

Quality Assessment Systems:

- a) *To what extent has the staff developed classroom or school-wide assessments based on clearly articulated expectations for student achievement?*

Testing of different kinds, from classroom assessments to national standardized tests, is used to evaluate the progress and achievement of students. Assessment is also individualized. Assessments appear to be fair and equitable. They are both formative and summative.

Leadership for School Improvement:

- a) *To what extent does the school leadership promote quality instruction by fostering an academic learning climate and actively supporting teaching and learning?*

Strong academic leadership is evident at Woodland Hills School. All stakeholder groups pointed out to the Visiting Team that academics are not sacrificed to money making at Woodland Hills School. The needs of students are the priority of the school.

- b) *To what extent does the school leadership employ effective decision making that is data-driven, research-based, and collaborative?*

Data-driven, collaborative, decision making is ongoing. Educational research is discussed in regularly scheduled meetings. Staff members are constantly seeking better ways to educate their special population of students.

- c) *To what extent does the school leadership monitor progress in student achievement and instructional effectiveness through a comprehensive assessment system and continuous reflection?*

The Visiting Team observed that this, too, is part of the very nature of Woodland Hills School.

- d) *To what extent does the school leadership provide skillful stewardship by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources of the school for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment?*

The school leadership is to be commended for accepting responsibility for assuring the above.

- e) *To what extent does the school leadership make decisions related to the allocation and use of resources which align with the school goals, the achievement of the DRSLs, and school improvement efforts?*

This, too, is commendable. A conscientious and fair system is evident. Teachers expressed gratitude for the ways in which resources are allocated.

- f) *To what extent does the school leadership empower the school community and encourage commitment, participation, collaboration, and shared responsibility for student learning?*

Yet again, the ethos of collaboration comes to mind. All are committed to quality education and improved learning/teaching. The school administration is exemplary in leading the collaborative effort.

Community Building:

- a) *To what extent does the school foster community building and working relationships within the school?*

Community building is a priority at Woodland Hills School. Collaborative networks support learning/teaching and the achievement of the DRSLs.

Culture of Continuous Improvement and Learning:

- a) *To what extent does the school build skills and the capacity for improvement through comprehensive and ongoing professional development programs focused on the school's goals for improvement?*

See several earlier sections of this report. A “culture of continuous improvement and learning” has been well established at Woodland Hills School.

- b) *To what extent does the school create conditions that support productive change and continuous improvement?*

Necessary change is supported, and continuous improvement is part of the ethos of Woodland Hills School. All are committed to amelioration.

CHAPTER 4: NORTHWEST ASSOCIATION OF ACCREDITED SCHOOLS (NAAS) STANDARDS I-XI

Standard I – Educational Program

Woodland Hills School meets all four sections of this standard. The educational program is aligned with the mission statement and beliefs. The Visiting Team observed that the vision for the school has been collaboratively developed. The instructional and organizational practices, as well as the policies and procedures, support the desired results for student learning and prepare students to succeed in a culturally diverse, democratic society. The program of studies meets the requirements of the state.

Standard II – Student Personnel Services

All three sections of this standard are met. Personnel services are designed to give appropriate, systematic assistance to students as called for in the subsections of the requirements. The assigned personnel for guidance includes a minimum of one full-time person for each 400 students enrolled. One primary objective of the counseling program is to promote and enhance the academic and personal development of students and to prepare them for post-high school experiences. Counselors also deal with the emotional needs of students and their personal problems.

Standard III – School Plant and Equipment

This standard is met. The school plant provides for a variety of instructional activities and programs and incorporates aesthetic features that contribute to a positive educational atmosphere. It provides for the health and safety of students and all school faculty and personnel. The facility is most attractive.

Standard IV – Library Media Program

The library media program contributes to the achievement of the DRSLs. A certified “consulting librarian” (on call—not a full- or part-time employee of the school) provides help for the media program. It appears that sufficient funds are provided each year to meet the library/media needs of students and teachers. However, the Visiting Team observed that further strengthening of the library is needed. The school recognizes this need and is working at improving the library media program. The school does meet this standard.

Standard V – Records

This standard is met. Student records are maintained, handled, and protected in the best interests of students and parents. Students and parents have the right to access personal student records and are ensured the privacy of such, as guaranteed by federal legislation.

Standard VI – School Improvement (This is addressed in the self-study.)

The five sections of this standard are met. The school improvement plan focuses on the total school rather than each of the separate components within the school. Systematic analysis of data regarding the performance of students has been incorporated into the comprehensive school improvement process, as has ongoing examination of instructional practices. The plan is updated and adjusted each year in alignment with perceived needs.

Standard VII – Preparation of Personnel

This standard is met. All professional personnel are in compliance with the licensing requirements of the state of Utah and are endorsed or properly temporarily exempted for the subjects they are teaching.

Standard VIII – Administration

This standard is met. The administration of Woodland Hills provides educational leadership, supervises and coordinates programs, and carries out the necessary and required administrative procedures.

Standard IX – Teacher Load

Woodland Hills School exceeds the requirements of this standard. The total number of students instructed by any one teacher in any one grading period does not exceed numbers set by the Utah State Office of Education and/or NAAS. The ratio is approximately 10 to one.

Standard X – Activities

This standard is met. The school supports some activities that supplement and augment the basic instructional program by providing additional enriching experiences for students consistent with the school's mission and beliefs. Attention is paid to providing equal opportunities.

Standard XI – Business Practices

This standard is met. The school is financially responsible. Proper budgetary procedures and generally accepted accounting principles are followed for all school funds. The school's advertising and promotional literature appear to be completely truthful and ethical.

CHAPTER 5: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS – ACTION PLAN

- a) *To what extent is the school-wide action plan adequate in addressing the critical areas for follow-up?*

The action plan is sufficiently detailed—with time lines, names of responsible persons, etc.—to achieve the desired outcomes for improvement and to address the critical areas for follow-up.

- b) *To what extent is there sufficient commitment to the action plan, school-wide and system-wide?*

As another example of collaboration, there is 100 percent commitment (as near as the Visiting Team could determine).

- c) *How sound does the follow-up process that the school intends to use for monitoring the accomplishments of the school wide action plan appear to be?*

As noted, follow-up is sufficiently detailed to assure achievement of the goals.

CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Commendations:

- The Visiting Team commends the entire staff and management, as well as support personnel, for their hospitality and frank assessment of Woodland Hills School.
- The Visiting Team commends the school community for conscientious development of the self-study, which follows guidelines recommended by the National Study of School Evaluation.
- The Visiting Team commends Woodland Hills School for achieving fully “approved” status for the last four years on its annual report to NAAS and the State of Utah.
- The Visiting Team commends the faculty and administrators for fostering a nurturing and caring approach in dealing with students.

- The Visiting Team commends the faculty and administrators for initiating effective programs that foster character building and self-responsibility, such as the behavioral integrity plan (BIP).
- The Visiting Team commends the faculty and administration for establishing service learning, in which students carry out service projects in the community.
- The Visiting Team commends the administration for holding regular meetings (in-service) with the faculty on the topic of the special needs of Woodland Hills School students.
- The Visiting Team commends the faculty and administration for fostering productive contacts with parents and for involving them in the school program.
- The Visiting Team commends the support staff for becoming involved in the school improvement process.

Recommendations:

- The Visiting Team recommends that students serve in future self-study groups.
- The Visiting Team recommends that all future self-studies include more data on teachers.
- The Visiting Team recommends that administrators and faculty members assure that the library will continue to increase the number of appropriate learning materials.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the entire school community consider the establishment of a scholarship fund that would allow some students who are unable to pay fees to attend Woodland Hills School.

The Visiting Team wishes to emphasize that the Woodland Hills self-study should assure the constituencies it serves that the school provides a quality educational program for its students based upon clearly defined goals and objectives that are appropriate for the unique school population served. The visit by the Visiting Team corroborates this assurance. Indeed, the school knows its business.